No. 428.

TO THE

RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

OF

THE SICK.

DO you think that you are quite doing your duty towards the sick member or inmate of your family? You may reply that you hope you are, that you are trying to do it; and perhaps you feel a little surprised that the question should be put to you. But it is such an important one that it demands your most serious consideration; and if you have a tender conscience, and are really desirous to do that which is right in the sight of God, you will not be easy, after you have heard this question once asked, until you are able to answer it satisfactorily.

It cannot be supposed that you have knowingly neglected anything which may promote the recovery, or add to the comfort of your relative or friend. You are, doubtless, doing as much in this way as lies in your power. And it is to be hoped that you are always kind and affectionate in your manner. Sick persons are very apt to be impatient, restless, and fretful, by reason of pain and infirmity; but this should not render those about them cross and angry, for we are bound to make every allowance for them, especially if we can remember how we have felt when we have been ill ourselves: and, besides, by acting or speaking unkindly we may even increase the violence of their disease.

We will suppose that in these respects you have done

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what is right; that you have taken care to get such nourishment or medicine as the sick person needs; that you are watchful to prevent all unnecessary noise and disturbance; and that you are always gentle and kind in your behaviour. Well, you will say, and what else is there to do? What duty remains to be performed? O my friend, the most important of all, your great duty toward the sick still remains. Have you not already guessed what it is? It is your duty of attending to the soul. Very often, those who are most particular about every thing else, totally neglect this. What a dreadful mistake! They watch night and day over the perishing body; they take care to provide for its comfort, and to relieve it from pain; but they quite forget the immortal soul. In the very worst and most lingering diseases, the body will have to endure its agonies only for a few years at most: but the soul, if it be ruined and lost, must suffer the torments of hell for ever. There can be no comparison between the value of the body and the value of the soul, any more than there can be between one day and eternity. Do you believe this, and feel that it is true? If so, then surely you will not refuse to do something for the soul of the sick member of your family or household.

But you may say, "I fear I am unfit for this duty. I have never thought so seriously as I ought about my own soul." If this be the case, you are in a sad state, a very dangerous state; but this is no reason why you should neglect one who is perhaps on the very verge of eternity, though it is a reason why you should seek mercy through Christ without any further delay. The sick or dying person may not be content to be ignorant. Ask him. Ask her. They are not likely to be so indifferent to this subject as they have been, and as you have been. But if they should, they are the more to be pitied, and you should make a greater effort to rouse them to attend to their best interests.

Do you ask how you are to do this; how you are to act in this matter? By all means send as soon as possible for a minister of the gospel, or some truly Christian neighbour,

and take care to let the sick person know that they are coming, that the mind may be prepared for the visit. But perhaps this has been done, and a friend has read the Scriptures, or talked or prayed with the patient. Do not suppose, however, that your duty has been quite performed in his case, and that you are free from all further obligation. Oh no! A single visit, or a course of daily visits is but a poor and meagre attendance upon a sick soul; and perhaps the minister cannot come oftener than once a-day, perhaps not so often. You must do something yourself. You must, if you value the soul of your relative; the immortal soul of your father, it may be, or your mother, your husband or wife, your brother or sister, or your child.

If you can read, get a Bible or Testament, and read some portions at every opportunity, as the patient can bear; and read them distinctly, slowly, and seriously, remembering that they are the words of God. At the end of this tract, you will find a list of passages proper to read to persons in various states of mind.

As the minister or friend can only come in now and then, it will often happen that his visit will not be at the most seasonable time; but you can choose the best times for this most necessary work: as, for instance, when the patient has been refreshed by sleep, or enjoys relief from pain and uneasiness; or is restless, and wants something to engage and occupy the mind. You may possibly be very busy; domestic cares may press heavily upon you, and the more so on account of the sickness in the family; but this will be no satisfactory excuse for not doing what has been recommended to you. God will not accept it as an excuse, neither I am sure will your own conscience. You must make some sacrifice of your ease and convenience. Oh who would not, in the hope of saving an immortal soul from endless misery! And if you cannot by any means find time to read yourself, surely you can get somebody to do it for you; a child, perhaps, or a neighbour.

But besides reading with your sick relative or inmate as

often as you can, you should try to keep his attention fixed upon the great subject of salvation, by mentioning it repeatedly. You may call to mind something that has been said by the visitor, or that has been read from God's word. You may frequently and affectionately inquire whether the sufferer has found comfort and relief in making full confession of sin to Almighty God, and in looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, for whose sake God will be merciful to all that repent of their sins, and believe on Him. Perhaps however you feel yourself unable to state clearly the way of salvation revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures: but, thanks be to God, it is simple, and plain, and easy to be understood. Hear what our Saviour himself has said, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became man, was obedient to the whole law of God, and then he suffered the penalty due to the disobedient, he died "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," 1 Pet. iii. 18. And he rose from the grave on the third day, and ascended into heaven, where he "ever liveth to make intercession for us," Heb. vii. 25; to obtain the pardon of our sins by pleading his own merits, and his own blood, which he shed for us upon the cross. And he will not refuse to plead thus for any poor sinner who humbly asks him. We are told that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." And he has himself said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isa. i. 18. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son," says the apostle John, "cleanseth us from all sin," 1 John i. 7.

And can you not try to pray? Although you may not have been in the habit of praying; although you may never have prayed before, surely now is the time to begin. You

see how needful religion is, pray for its influence on your own heart, and pray for your sick friend. When you consider that the salvation of one very near you is at stake, and when in a few days, perhaps in a few hours, his condition may be settled for eternity, surely you should pray. It is not necessary to make long prayers. If your petitions be humble and earnest, and offered in the name of Jesus Christ, in dependance upon his merits and intercession, God will listen to them, however short they may be. You can fall down on your knees, and say, " Lord have mercy upon this poor sinner. O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake, who shed his precious blood for us, pardon all *his** sins. Give *him* grace to repent and believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. O Lord Jesus Christ, send thy Holy Spirit to change *his* heart, and to make *him* know and love thee. O Lord God, our heavenly Father, deliver *his* soul from hell, for thy dear Son's sake. Amen."

And even if you do not feel able to pray in your own words, you can procure a book of prayers, in which you will find many suitable for all cases.

And now you have been told what you ought to do, and what you can do. If it was your duty before you read this tract, to attend to the soul of the sick person under your roof, it is doubly your duty now. You cannot plead ignorance. You cannot say you did not know your duty. It has been plainly set before you, and you may endanger the salvation of a soul. If your sick charge should perish everlastingly, without your making any effort to save him, without your giving him warning of his danger, and telling him of Christ, who alone can deliver him from it, he will perish in his iniquity; but his blood will God require at your hand. See Ezekiel xxxiii. 8.

But if, on the contrary, your reading, your prayers, your admonitions, or those of the minister or visitor for whom you have sent, should be blessed by God to his conversion;

* Or *her* as the case may be.

if by these means, he should be brought to repentance, and to faith in Christ, so as to die happily, having "a good hope through grace," what a consolation will this afford to you after his death! how many self reproaches will it save you! And above all, what an encouragement will it be to you to ask mercy for your own soul, of that God, who, for Christ's sake, has had mercy on his!

And consider, I beseech you, that at no very distant period, sooner, perhaps, than you are disposed to think, you must be brought into the same condition as the poor sufferer on whose behalf we are now pleading with you. You also must lie on a sick bed—a death-bed; and then you will feel the need of the consolations of religion for yourself; and how bitterly will you then lament (if you should neglect this warning) that you refused to supply them to another; to one who claimed them at your hands.

But you are not quite sure that you will have the opportunity of considering your ways, and repenting of your sins, and of seeking the Saviour on a sick bed. You may be cut off suddenly, by disease or accident. You may lose your faculties in your last illness, (as many do,) and so be unable to listen or to think. You have before you an instance of the frailty of life, and the mortality of our nature, but you may perhaps become a more striking instance of this yourself. O then be wise, and consider your latter end, and remember for the sake of the sick person, and for your own sake, that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. vi. 2. "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart," Heb. iii. 15. To-morrow may never come.

Passages proper to read to persons who seem careless about their souls.

Old Testament.—Job ix. 20 to 35; xxxiii. 8 to 30. Psa. i. v. xi. xiv. lviii. Prov. i. 24 to 33; xxviii. 9 to 14. Isa. xxxiii. 13 to 17. Jer. v. 20 to 25; xvii. 5 to 10. Ezek. xviii. 20 to 32.

New Testament.—Matt. iii. 7 to 12; xii. 30 to 37; xxv. 31 to 46. Luke vi. 46 to 49; xii. 4 to 9; xvi. 19 to 31; xix. 12 to 27. John iii. 18 to 20; v. 36; v. 25 to 29. Rom. ii. 1 to 11. Gal. v. 19 to 26. Heb. ii. 1 to 4. 2 Pet. iii. 8 to 12. 1 John iii. 7 to 10. Rev. xxi. 1 to 8.

Passages for those who are penitent, and seek for pardon and salvation.

Old Testament.—Exod. xxxiv. 5 to 7. Psa. vi. xvi. xxv. xxvii. xxxi. xxxii. xxxviii. li. lxi. lxxxvi. cxxx. Isa. i. 16 to 20; xii. liii. lv. 1 to 7; lvii. 15 to 21. Joel ii. 12 to 14. Micah vi. 6 to 8. Malachi iii. 13 to 18; iv.

New Testament.—Matt. vii. 7 to 14; ix. 1 to 13; xi. 25 to 30; xxvii. 27 to 54. Luke i. 68 to 79; ix. 23 to 27; xv. 1 to 10. John i. 1 to 18; iii. 1 to 21; vi. 47 to 71; x. 1 to 18, and 27 to 30; xv. 1 to 11. Acts iii. 18 to 26; xiii. 27 to 41. Rom. v. 1 to 11; viii. 1 to 17. 1 Cor. i. 18 to 31; xv. 20 to 28; and 51 to 57. 2 Cor. v. 1 to 11. Gal. ii. 15 to 21; iii. 7 to 14; v. 16 to 26. Eph. i. 3 to 14; ii. 1 to 10; v. 15 to 21. Phil. ii. 5 to 11; iii. 7 to 14. Col. i. 9 to 23; iii. 1 to 17. 1 Thess. v. 8 to 24. 1 Tim. i. 12 to 17. Tit. iii. 3 to 8. Heb. vi. 11 to 20; ix. 11 to 14, and 24 to 28; x. 19 to 29, and 35 to 39; xii. 1 to 11; xiii. 10 to 21. James iv. 7 to 12; v. 7 to 11. 1 Pet. i. 13 to 25; ii. 21 to 25. 1 John i. iv. 9 to 21.

Passages for those who are very much distressed in mind through a sense of sin, and fear of death.

Old Testament.—Psa. xiii. xxii. lxix. 13 to 17; lxxvii. lxxxviii. cxliii. Isa. xxxv. xlii. 1 to 9; xliii. 22 to 28; lxi. 1 to 3. Hos. xiv.

New Testament.—Luke xi. 5 to 13; xv. 11 to 32; xxiii. 32 to 43. John iii. 14 to 18; vi. 35 to 40. 2 Cor. vi. 17 to 21; vii. 9 to 11. Gal. iii. 10 to 14, and 22 to 29. Titus iii. 3 to 7. Heb. ii. 14 to 18; iv. 14 to 16; vi. 17 to 20; viii.

6 to 12: x. 19 to 25. James i. 1 to 7. 1 John i. 5 to 10; ii. 1 to 3.

Passages suitable for all cases, containing instruction, encouragement, warning, and consolation.

Psalms xxxix. xlix. xc. xci. xciv. cxix. 25 to 40, and 73 to 80, and 97 to 112, and 145 to 160. Isa. xxvi. xl. Lam. iii. 1 to 41. Matt. v. vi. vii. xviii. 1 to 14; xxvii. John vi. 24 to 71; x. xii. 20 to 50; xxi. Rom. xii. xiii. 1 Thess. iv. Heb. xiii. Rev. xxii.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. iii. 16.

My soul lies cleaving to the dust;
Lord, give me life divine
From vain desires and every lust
Turn off these eyes of mine.

I need the influence of thy grace
To speed me in thy way,
Lest I should loiter in my race
Or turn my feet astray.

When sore afflictions press me down,
I need thy quickening powers,
Thy word that I have rested on
Shall help my heaviest hours.

Then shall I love thy gospel more,
And ne'er forget thy word,
When I have felt its quickening power,
To draw me near the Lord.

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